



Communication Plan Development Workbook

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Introduction

Communication Plan Workbook Description

This communication plan workbook describes each component of a communication plan and provides examples and space for state teams to draft sections of their own communication plan. You will transfer the content you develop during the face-to-face workshop to the communication plan template (located online and in your workshop folder) that you will use in Part 3 of the *WIOA Communication Planning for Adult Education Administrators Institute*. Your completed communication plan will serve as the main reference document for your team, who will be responsible for completing the proposed communication activities. It also will serve as a tool to measure your progress.

Why We Plan

The planning you do now will provide the foundation for your entire communication approach; it will enable your team to produce meaningful results. Effective planning will help you do the following:

- Understand the issue you are addressing.
- Determine appropriate roles and the purpose for communication.
- Identify the approaches necessary to bring about or support the desired changes.
- Establish a logical development process.
- Create a communication plan that supports clearly defined objectives.
- Set priorities.
- Assign responsibilities.
- Assess progress and determine an evaluation process.
- Avert disasters.

Under the pressure of deadlines and demands, you may think, “I don’t have time to plan; I have to get started NOW,” which is normal. However, following a strategic planning process will save time. Planning will ensure that you define program objectives and then tailor your program’s activities to meet those objectives so that you don’t spend time doing unnecessary work.



Part I: Writing the Introduction

The introduction presents the main idea of your communication plan and sets the frame for the communication strategies and activities that you will propose in the rest of the plan. It should tell why the plan was developed, why it's important, and what you hope to accomplish by implementing the plan. **You will complete the communication plan introduction in Part 3 of the Institute.**

Questions to Consider¹

- What situation have we identified that partnering can improve?
- What change needs to occur to improve that situation?
- Why is this partner suited to achieve these changes?

The Introduction Should Address the Following Questions

1. What are the implications of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*? Describe the big picture of how new requirements for partnerships will affect adult education in your state and beyond.
2. What are the implications of improving partner engagement under WIOA for adult education within your state?
3. What partners does your state currently collaborate with to meet WIOA goals? How does the state communicate with these partners? What local conditions and relationships will shape the implementation of WIOA? What successes or challenges have you had in collaborating or communicating with partners?
4. What might success look like in your state 5–10 years from now? Envision what partnerships will exist and how they will serve the community. What will implementing your communication plan accomplish?

¹ Most sections include questions to consider. The questions are intended to support your team's thinking and guide you in your planning. The questions **do not** need to be answered in the draft sections but should inform your response.

Example Introduction

This *Adult Education Agency Communication Plan* begins and ends with the following premise: The success of the [State's] economy will be determined ultimately by the strength and quality of its workforce and the ability of employers to fill their need for skilled labor; the Adult Education Agency, through its adult education programs in [State], is well positioned and qualified to help prepare this workforce. The purpose of this *Adult Education Agency Communication Plan* is to provide a roadmap that will enable the Adult Education Agency to reach the Department of Economic Development as a potential partner. The aerospace industry has proven to be a high-growth area in the state, and, therefore, the Adult Education Agency seeks to promote the resources and services it provides that foster adult learners' technology and math skills development. The Adult Education Agency, through the local providers, can prepare qualified workers to meet current aerospace industry needs, and entice additional aerospace companies to locate in this region, both of which align with the Department of Economic Development's mission to fuel economic growth in the state. Establishing a strong relationship with the Department of Economic Development will enable the Adult Education Agency to improve connections to the local aerospace companies and increase skill development and job placement of adult education learners.

Your Team's Communication Plan Introduction

Part II: Defining Goals and SMART Objectives

Long-range outcome statements—goals—will guide the development of your communication strategy. Aligning your communication plan goals with your program goals is important.

Program Goals

Program goals are what your organization aims to accomplish. They are long-range outcome statements that present what you want to achieve or improve. Program goals can be broad but should be measurable. These goals will guide the development of your overall communication strategy.

Questions to Consider

- What will my agency or organization have accomplished through this communication plan?
- What are we trying to influence the partners to understand and do?
- Are the goals attainable?
- Are resources in place to attain the goals?

The following example goal can provide guidance as you develop your communication plan. For a complete copy of the sample communication plan, refer to the online materials.

Improve the strength and quality of the state workforce and the ability of employers to fill their need for skilled labor through the adult education system.

Your Team's Program Goals

1.

2.

3.

Communication Goals

Communication goals are the outcomes you want to achieve as a result of your communication efforts. These are broad statements that frame the rest of the communication plan.

Questions to Consider

- Generally, what do we want the target of our communication to know or understand?
- Generally, what information do we think the target of our communication needs to have so they can take action that will help us achieve our program goals?

The following example goals can provide guidance as you develop your communication plan. For a complete copy of the sample communication plan, refer to the online materials.

1. Build a partnership with key decision makers within the Department of Economic Development.
2. Expand employer-driven partnerships to increase the education and training focus on critical in-demand occupations in the aerospace industry.
3. Build upon current partnership with the Technical Community College System to develop a pipeline for students.

Your Team's Communication Goals

Brainstorm one to three goals that you hope to accomplish in your state through WIOA partnerships. You will refer to these goals throughout the communication planning process.

1.

2.

3.

Objectives

Objectives are short-to-intermediate outcome statements that are clear, measurable, and specifically tied to the goal(s).

Defining communication objectives will achieve the following:

- Help you set priorities for possible communication activities and determine the message and content you will use for each.
- Serve as a kind of contract or agreement between you and your staff working on or responsible for different communication activities.
- Establish what outcomes should be measured.

Questions to Consider

- Are the priorities clearly stated?
- Are the objectives SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time based)?
- Have we mapped out how and when the objectives can be met and measured?

Planning Your Objectives

Refer to the goals you listed previously and answer the following question in the box: “How can a communication plan contribute to attaining the goals?” The answer to this question will help you draft your objectives.

Resources: Many communication efforts fail only because the original objectives were not realistic given the time and resources available to the team. Thinking through what resources are available to you and will support your communication effort is important so that you can create achievable objectives. Consider whether you have the following resources to support the implementation of your communication plan:

- **Staff** and other human resources, committee members, associates from other programs, volunteers, and others who have the requisite skills and time
- **Overhead** resources, such as computer time, a graphic designer (if needed), mailing costs, and printing
- **Budget** available to fund the efforts
- **Time** (weeks, months, or years available to complete the work)
- **External supports** to draw on, such as services provided by other agencies to contribute to the communication effort or information that already exists that you can reuse and repackage

The best way to make sure that your objectives fit within the identified constraints of your program is to write SMART objectives. SMART objectives have the following characteristics:

Specific: Specify what is to be achieved, by how much, and by when.

Measurable: Make sure that the objective can be measured—that it includes metrics and that you have the resources in place to assess progress toward meeting the objectives (i.e., data are or will be available to measure progress).

Attainable: Set objectives that are feasible for the agency.

Relevant: Align objectives with the mission and vision of the agency.

Time based: Establish a timeframe for achieving the objective.

TIP! This formula will help you develop SMART objectives:
Measure of change, in what, by whom, by when
Example: 20% increase in health department nursing staff by January 2019

Example Objectives

The following example objectives can guide you as you develop your objectives. For a complete copy of the sample communication plan, refer to the online materials.

1. By the end of the first quarter, demonstrate to the Department of Economic Development that partnerships with the Adult Education Agency are beneficial in connecting the Department with students who are prepared for employment opportunities.
2. By the end of the second quarter, increase United Technologies and Boeing’s knowledge of Adult Education Agency programs.
3. By the end of the second quarter, develop an articulation agreement and an MOU with the Technical Community College System.

Your Team’s Objectives

Write your objectives here. Refer to the questions you answered earlier about available resources, how you plan to measure success, and each component of SMART objectives. The number of objectives you choose to list will depend on your analysis of what you can accomplish with your communication plan.

1.
2.
3.

Part III: Message Development

Next, you will learn how to frame and present messages that communicate to potential partners that adult education in your state is valuable. Adult education can support the implementation of education, training, and success under WIOA in your state.

Message Development Process

Step 1. Identify and understand the audience.

Step 2. Decide what your core messages are.

Step 3. Select the types of data that will support the core messages (e.g., demographic, program enrollment, unemployment rates).

Step 4. Develop the message in plain language.

Step 5. Plan for and deliver your message.

Step 1. Identify and Understand Your Audience

Questions to Consider

- What are the attitudes, values, motivations, concerns, interests, and needs of the audience?
- What is their point of view?
- What do they know about the subject?
- What action do we want them to take?
- What are the benefits if they take action?

Example Audience

The following values and concerns of the example audiences can provide guidance as you determine your audience. For a complete copy of the sample communication plan, refer to the online materials.

Audience A: Department of Economic Development

- Increase economic growth in the region through innovation.
- Improve economic capacity of individuals, communities, and industries.
- Increase regional collaborations to bring in-demand jobs to the region.

Audience B: Industry-related employers

- Locate skilled workers.
- Connect to partners who can provide training for potential skilled workers.

Audience C: Technical Community College System

- Increase graduation rates.
- Increase employment rates.

About Your Audience

For a communication plan to be successful, it must be based on an understanding of the needs and perceptions of the intended audience. As a team, answer the following questions to focus on the right audience for your communication message.

1. With whom did we decide to partner under WIOA?
2. Why are they important?
3. What do we want from them?
4. What information will potential partners want from us and through what channels would they like to receive it?
5. What is the value of each partner?
6. Based on the value of each partner, prioritize the partners. Which partner is the highest priority for us?
7. What types of messages are effective for our intended audience?

8. What opportunities would facilitate successful communication with the audience?
Opportunities might include related events (i.e., WIOA/statewide meetings) or current relationships that offer a time, place, or communication channel that is appropriate to reach your audience.
9. What barriers would prevent our message from reaching the audience member(s)? What barriers would prevent the audience from “hearing” our message?

Next, bring together the communication objectives you created for your partner audiences. Fill in the following table with the program goals, audience types, communication objectives, and the information that you want to communicate. The information is based on the analysis you completed earlier; it’s not your final message.

Program Goal(s):		
Who are the intended audiences?	What communication objective is relevant to this audience?	What information do we want to communicate?
<i>Audience A:</i>		
<i>Audience B:</i>		

Note: Add more rows as needed.

Step 2. Decide What Your Core Messages Are

You will develop core messages. **Core messages** communicate the essential points you want to share (the information you want to communicate as listed in the table on the previous page) in plain language that can be easily understood (see page 20 for more details on plain language). Three to five core messages usually suffice. Core messages don't have to be used "as is"—rather you can repackage them as stories and weave them into your outreach materials and products, emphasizing the aspects of the message most relevant to the particular audience receiving it. Core messages serve as a point of reference as their main function to guide communication planning and development. The messages communicated are linked to goals and objectives. They should be clear, simple, concise, and compelling. They should convey a call to action and how the partner will benefit from engaging with you.

Questions to Consider

- What do we as the communication plan authors want the audience to know?
- What story do we want to tell the audience?
- How will the content of this message benefit the target audience?
- Why will the target audience care about this message?
- What data do we need to support the story (e.g., demographic, program enrollment, unemployment rates)?
- Is the message in plain language?
- How should we convey this message? What tools will be used?

Guide for Creating the Core Message(s)

You will refer to the answers to these questions in Step 3.

1. What is/are our communication goal(s)? (Step 1)
2. What background knowledge does our intended audience have about our work? (Step 2)
 - a. What is their current level of interest?
 - b. Would we define them as friendly, indifferent, or hostile?
3. What are the commonalities that adult education shares with those potential partners?
4. What are the strengths that adult education brings to those potential partners?
5. How can these be helpful to our audience?
6. What related issues are important to our audience?

Example Messages

The following example messages can provide guidance as you develop your messages. For a complete copy of the sample communication plan, refer to the online materials.

Audience A: Department of Economic Development

- Adult education focuses on education and training to build technology and mathematics skills that are important to supporting high-growth areas, such as aerospace engineering employment opportunities in our state.
- Adult education provides a platform to connect adult learners and industries to offer workplace classes with co-enrollment in adult education programs at the local community college.
- Adult education can provide learning opportunities to adult learners for other high-growth industries, thus improving our state's economic development.

Audience B: Industry-related employers

- Adult education contributes to the aerospace workforce through education and training to build technology and mathematics skills that are important to supporting this business currently and growing the business in the future.
- Adult education provides a platform to connect industries with qualified and skilled adult learners.
- Adult education provides instructional expertise to align workplace instruction with industry competencies.
- Research shows that teaching that combines literacy in a work-related context is effective in increasing both literacy and work-specific knowledge and skills.

Audience C: Technical Community College System

- Adult education focuses on education and training to build technology and mathematics skills that are important to supporting high-growth areas, such as aerospace engineering employment opportunities in the state.
- Adult education provides a platform to connect adult learners and industries to offer workplace classes with co-enrollment in adult education programs at the local community college.
- Adult education under WIOA can fund combined basic skills and workforce training through co-enrollment.
- Title II funds can help leverage additional funds for such instruction from business and the U.S. Department of Labor.
- Research shows that teaching combined literacy in a work-related skills context is effective.

Your Team's Core Messages

Write three to five core messages.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

You will develop stories to support your core messages. You can tailor your core messages by creating stories that build up and support each individual message to achieve the intended outcome of your communication plan. Each story should reflect the core message(s) that you want to convey to your audience. Use your core messages as a compass to help you determine what stories to tell. Stories are an opportunity to help people remember your message. You can use the stories to help support the messages. A story makes people feel good and be able to relate to your core message.

Based on the core messages identified earlier, what stories might you tell to your audience?

1.
2.
3.

Step 3. Select the Types of Data That Support Your Core Messages

Think about where you will find and select the data for your core messages. Most of the data will be in your data management system. To provide a complete picture, you may need to go to other data sources (suggestions are included here). Keep in mind that data should be valid, reliable, and of high quality.

Questions to Consider

- What type of data do we need to support the core messages? What should we emphasize? In what type of data is our audience interested?
- To provide a complete picture, what level (e.g., national, state, local, program) should the data reflect?

Data Sources to Consider

National Reporting System

<http://www.nrsweb.org/>

U.S. Department of Education (National Center for Education Statistics)

<https://nces.ed.gov/>

<https://nces.ed.gov/datatools/>

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies

<http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>

<https://data.oecd.org/>

American Community Survey

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

U.S. Census Data Tools and Apps

<https://www.census.gov/data/data-tools.html>

Current Population Survey

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>

Occupational Employment Statistics

<https://www.bls.gov/oes/>

Current Employment Statistics

<https://www.bls.gov/ces/>

Local Area Unemployment Statistics

<https://www.bls.gov/lau/>

Employment Projections

<https://www.bls.gov/emp/>

Occupational Information Network

<https://www.onetonline.org/>

State Workforce Data Quality Initiative systems

<https://www.doleta.gov/performance/workforcedataquality.cfm>

Your Team's Data Sources

Write a brief description or summary of the story you want to tell in the following box. Then brainstorm and list any data sources that might help you communicate your core message or story.

Description/Summary of Core Message(s)
Data Source(s) and Type(s) of Data to Be Used

Including a human component to your core messages is a good way to gain the attention and interest of your audience. If you have access to quotes or other qualitative data, include them to highlight the human element.

Enter your messages into the following table. Then consider what type of human story you can incorporate to gain interest and attention.

Core Message	Human Story

Step 4. Develop the Message in Plain Language

This will be completed in later in the planning process. See Part IV, page 20.

Step 5. Plan for and Deliver Your Message

Fill in the audience members from Step 1 and decide what messages you want to deliver to each audience. Refer to Step 2 to make sure that your messages align with your goals and the overall story that you want to tell. Then think about and write down who can help deliver these messages. If helpful to your team, also include the core message you are addressing in the following table.

<i>Core Message:</i>	
Target Audience(s)	Who Can Help With Delivery?
<i>Audience A:</i> <i>Supporting Messages:</i> 1. 2. 3.	
<i>Audience B:</i> <i>Supporting Messages:</i> 1. 2. 3.	

Part IV: Writing in Plain Language

Writing in plain language will help your readers find what they need, understand what they find, and use what they find to meet their needs. Although plain language is a familiar idea (and a federal law), many organizations don't use it as often as they should. The [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) requires federal agencies to use plain language when they communicate with the public, but it's useful practice for any public service organization.

Here are some basic tenets of plain language:

Organize to serve the audience

- Know your audience and purpose before you begin writing.
- Put the most important message first.
- Present other information in the order of importance to the audience.
- Break text into logical chunks and use headings.

Choose words carefully

- Write in the active voice.
- Choose words and numbers that your audience knows.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- Include "you" and other pronouns.

Make information easy to find

- Use headings and text boxes.
- Delete unnecessary words, sentences, and paragraphs.
- Create lists and tables.

Plain language means creating a document that is visually inviting, organized, and understandable on the first reading.

Checklist for Plain Language Messaging

Use the following checklists as you develop your messages. Refer to the plain language federal guidelines document² for more information and details. Items with a  also can be helpful to improve your verbal communication!

- Write your message for the average reader. Know the expertise and interest of your average reader and write to that person. Don't write to the experts, unless they are your intended audience.
-  Organize your message to serve the reader's needs. Put the most important information first and exceptions last. Organize the material chronologically or in whatever sequence will best meet the reader's orientation.
- Use headings. Headings help readers find their way through your material. Headings capture the essence of all the material under the heading. Aim for one or more headings on each page.
-  Use "you" and other pronouns to make your message more meaningful to the audience. Use "you" for the audience, "I" when writing question headings from the reader's viewpoint, and "we" for your team or agency.
-  Use an active voice to clarify who is doing what. Active voice is generally shorter and clearer. Active sentences are structured with the actor first (as the subject), then the verb, and then the object of the action.
- Use short sections and sentences. Readers get lost in long, dense text with few headings. Chunking your messages also inserts white space, opening your document visually and making it more appealing.
-  Use concrete, familiar words. Define and limit your abbreviations. Avoid jargon, foreign terms, Latin terms, and legal terms.
-  Use "must" or "will" instead of "shall" as a clear way to express a requirement or an obligation.
- Shorten and clarify complex material by using lists and tables. These features give your document more white space, making it more appealing to the reader.

² <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/quickreference/checklist.cfm>

Document Checklist for Plain Language on the Web

- Be concise. Less is more.
- Break documents into separate topics.
- Use short paragraphs.
- Use short lists and bullets to organize information.
- Use more lists than you would in other mediums.
- Use more headings with less under each heading.
- Questions often make great headings.
- Present each topic or point separately and use descriptive section headings.
- Keep the information on each page to no more than two levels.
- Make liberal use of white space so that pages are easy to scan.
- Write (especially page titles) using the same words your readers would use when doing a Web search for the information.
- Don't assume your readers have knowledge of the subject or have read related pages on your website. Clearly explain things so that each page can stand on its own.
- Never use "click here" as a link. Link language should describe what readers would get if they click the link.
- Eliminate unnecessary words.

Your Messages in Plain Language

Rewrite each of your messages in plain language using the plain language checklist and federal guidelines provided on pages 21 and 22.

Core Message	Plain Language Rewrite

Part V: Communication Channels and Activities

Now that you have identified your project goals, objectives, key messages, and audiences, you will choose communication channels and activities that align with the goals and needs of the intended audiences. Also, identify channels and activities that the intended audience(s) considers credible and influential. In the case of WIOA, this may mean building awareness of the credibility of outcome data sources among your audience (e.g., How do you collect your data? How often are data validated?).

Here you will identify the channels (Step 1) and activities (Step 2) that you will use to shape further how you repackage your core messages. In Step 3, you will record the results of this activity to include later in your communication plan.

Step 1. Choose Communication Channels That Reflect the Needs and Preferences of Your Audience as Well as the Strengths and Limitations of Your Key Messages

Choosing appropriate channels is an integral part of a successful communication plan.

- Intended audience you want to reach:
 - Will the channel and activity reach and influence the intended audiences?
 - Are the channel and activity acceptable to and trusted by the intended audiences? Can they influence attitudes?
- Your message:
 - Is the channel appropriate for conveying information at the desired level of simplicity or complexity?
- Channel reach:
 - How many people will the message reach?
 - Can the channel meet intended audience interaction needs?
- Cost and accessibility:
 - Does our program have the resources to use the channel and the activity?
- Activities and materials:
 - Is the channel appropriate for the activity or materials we plan to produce?
 - *Note:* Decisions about activities and channels are interrelated and should be made in tandem.
 - Will the channel and activity reinforce messages and activities we plan through other routes to increase overall exposure among the intended audience?

Also, think about what roadblocks you might face in reaching each audience using different channels or activities. For example, your audience might be very active on social media, but if your program does not have a well-established presence on social media, you may need to do extra work to create or improve your communications through that channel.

Using several different channels increases the likelihood of reaching more of the intended audience(s). It also can increase repetition of the message, improving the chance that the intended audience(s) will be exposed to it often enough to absorb and act on it. For these reasons, a combination of channels is most effective in producing results. Consider the following different categories of channels to diversify your message dissemination.

Interpersonal Channels

Interpersonal channels (e.g., colleagues, partners, friends) put messages in a familiar context. These channels are more likely to be trusted and influential than media sources. Developing messages, materials, and links into interpersonal channels can be time and resource consuming. However, these channels are among the most effective, especially for affecting attitudes, skills, and behavior or behavioral intent.

Influence through interpersonal contacts may work best when the individual is already familiar with the message, for example, from hearing it through mass media exposure. (Similarly, mass media are most effective at changing behavior when they are supplemented with interpersonal channels.)

Group Channels

Group channels (e.g., brown bag lunches at work, conference activities; professional networking events) help your program reach more of the intended audience, retaining some of the influence of interpersonal channels. These channels add the benefits of group discussion and affirmation of the messages. Messages can be designed for groups with specific things in common, such as workplace or professional affiliations.

Influence through group channels is more effective when groups are already familiar with the message through interpersonal channels or the others described here. As with interpersonal channels, working through group channels can require significant levels of effort.

A “group” may be a community or an organization.

Mass Media (not covered in the Institute)

Mass media channels (e.g., radio, network and cable television, magazines, direct mail, billboards, newspapers, social media) offer many opportunities for message dissemination, including mentions in news programs; entertainment programming (entertainment education); public affairs programs; magazine and talk shows (including radio audience call-ins); live remote broadcasts; editorials (television, radio, newspapers, magazines); posters; brochures; advertising; and public service campaigns.

Mass media campaigns are a tried-and-true communication approach. Overall, research has demonstrated the effectiveness of mass media approaches in the following areas:

- Raising awareness
- Stimulating the intended audience to seek information and services
- Increasing knowledge
- Changing attitudes and even achieving some change (usually) in self-reported behavioral intentions and behaviors

Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)

Social media enable communicators to deliver highly tailored messages to and receive feedback from the intended audience. These channels can produce both mass communication and interpersonal interaction.

Social media can be used to send individual messages, post program messages, create and display advertisements, survey and gather information from computer users, engage intended audiences in interactive activities, and exchange ideas with peers and partners.



Here are some things to remember when using social media as an advocacy tool:

- **Build a brand.** If you are developing a social media presence, building a brand means establishing yourself as a recognized and trusted source of information.
- **Use hashtags.** Hashtags are useful for tracking conversations and followers. They also can help you build your brand identity.
- **Link content across accounts.** Creating content on multiple platforms encourages people to visit your website or other social media accounts. It's an opportunity to provide messages in multiple formats and improve the chances that your audience will receive the message.
- **Remember, it's more than 280 characters and hashtags.** Including videos, images, and links to complimentary content provides depth to your message. Don't let the requisite text restraints limit your impact.
- **Partner with other organizations.** Growing your online network and making personal connections is a great way to tap into the networks of other groups. Delivering messages on the platforms of other groups can help you establish yourself as a trusted and respected source of information.

Blogging

Bloggers often have significant reach and influence with an audience. They also might represent diverse audience groups. Blogs can be in the form of an interview (they interview you or a spokesperson for your agency) and can include promotional social media of the blog post.



If you are writing your own blog content, it can be an informal way to tell your story in your own voice and on your own schedule.

Important things to remember when using a blog to share information:

- **Make it work for you.** There is no schedule. Post when the content is relevant.
- **The internet enables us to represent our own niche market.** Make sure your content tells your story. Don't feel that you have to reach an audience broader than what you planned for; there always will be people interested in what you have to say.

- **Take advantage of opportunities to expand beyond your platform.** Blog content often is picked up by other groups that are interested in your topic. If another groups' channel posts your content, promote it.

Step 2. Choose Activities That Will Highlight Your Message in Each of Your Chosen Channels

Before looking at the following list of options, consider each audience's preferred methods of obtaining and sharing information. In Step 1, you considered which communication channels would be best for reaching each intended audience group.

Once you have thought through the factors outlined in Step 1, choose from the following list of activities. This is not a comprehensive list, so you may want to brainstorm additional activities that would be appropriate for your audience and message.

Communication Products and Activities

- **Website Promotion.** Post data and relevant messages on your website. Web content can be in a variety of formats and can link to any communications product.
- **Newsletters and Eblasts.** Craft a newsletter article or send an eblast that includes the relevant messages and a link to your website or link to any relevant products online. Build an email list for each target audience group.
- **Social Media Activities.** Craft Twitter and Facebook posts. Disseminate through your organization's social media, if available. Ask current stakeholders, partners, and relevant organizations to share through their social media and networks. You can craft sample social media messages and share them with your audience through interpersonal communication, enabling them to share your message(s) with their own followers.
- **Infographics and Data Visualization.** Work with designers or use a free online tool such as [Canva](#) or [Piktochart](#) to represent the core messages and data visually in a way that makes accessing and understanding them easier for broader audiences.
- **One-Pagers.** Consider creating one- to two-page briefs or synopses that summarize important messages and link to any relevant products that your communication team develops (e.g., infographics, social media accounts, presentations, videos). Customize the one-pagers for specific audiences. Post on websites, send out by email, and distribute at events.
- **Brochures, Pamphlets, Posters.** Consider whether a brochure, a pamphlet, or a poster would be an effective means of sharing data and core messages. If so, work with a designer or use a free online tool to produce the piece.
- **Events (Webinars, Conferences, Workshops).** Consider hosting an event, in-person or virtual, with current partners to share your messages.
- **Presentations at Conferences and Events.** Create a list of conferences and events that target audiences will attend and determine how to share information at each (e.g., presentation, print dissemination). You also may choose to create template slides and scripts to enable your audience members to share your message(s) with their own audience.

- **Videos.** Consider working with a team to develop a short video or video series about the data and information about your state. Videos may feature the overall story of your program or department, focus on a specific resource, or include an impact/success story from a current partner, other organization or agency, or community member.
- **Blogs.** Consider whether an expert might write a blog post about the issue for a blog.
- **Other Activities.** Other activities include online chats (e.g., Reddit), podcasts, apps and tools, public service announcements, and community events/meetings.

Remember, using several different channels increases the likelihood of reaching more of the intended audiences. It also can increase repetition of the message, improving the chance that the intended audiences will be exposed to it often enough to absorb and act on it.

Step 3. Record Your Chosen Channels and Activities and Align Them With Your Audience and Messages

In the following table, fill in the audience members and messages and record which channels, activities, and products you want to use to reach them. Think about and write down who can help deliver these messages or who should participate in the activities.

Target Audience(s)	What Channels and Activities Should Be Used?	Who Can Help Deliver the Message(s) on this Channel? Who Should Participate in the Activity?	What Materials Are Needed?
<i>Audience A:</i> <i>Core Messages:</i> 1. 2. 3.			
<i>Audience B:</i> <i>Core Messages:</i> 1. 2. 3.			

Part VI: Data

The more you understand about an issue, the better you can plan a communication approach that will address it successfully. The purpose of data collection is to describe the following:

- The problem or issue
- Who is affected
- What is occurring versus what should be occurring

Doing this will enable you to consider how communication might help address the issue or problem.

In this step, you will gather specific data points to support your messages. As a starting point, you may want to refer to Part IV of this workbook, in which you identified what types of data will support your key messages for each audience. Using that information, and pulling from known data sources, record relevant data in the following table.

Data Source and Date Found	Data	Audience	Related Message/ Objective

Part VII: Evaluation

Evaluation assesses the degree to which the communication objectives are achieved as measured against benchmarks. In other words, did you accomplish your objectives? Which core messages reached which audiences, and what resulted from this communication? Evaluating your communication plan against your objectives can help you know how effective your messages were both in content and delivery, as well as behavior changes that resulted.

To measure progress, you will establish a baseline and set measurable objectives. Many methods can be used to determine success, such as surveys, interviews, tracking behaviors such as program attendance and website usage statistics, and in-person or virtual follow-up.

Questions to Consider

- How do we want to monitor results?
- What evidence do we need to know that the plan has been effective?

Now that you have defined the intended audiences and the actions you want them to take (communication objectives) and explored the settings, channels, and activities for reaching them, you can use this information as the basis for developing a communication strategy and draft the evaluation plan.

Evaluating the progress and implementation of your communication plan is important. You need to know whether the plan was implemented as you intended (process measures) and whether changes took place (outcome measures).

Developing your evaluation early in the planning process will ensure that you are ready to collect baseline data before implementation begins, build any evaluation mechanisms into the process, and ensure that resources are allocated. A process evaluation is one type of evaluation you can use. If your team has the capacity to conduct a more in-depth evaluation, such as an outcome evaluation, that is another option.

Process Evaluation

After you have decided how you will measure the accomplishment of your objectives, you will want to plan to evaluate the process of reaching your objectives. This type of evaluation enables you to monitor the results of your activities and refine the communication plan as needed.

Completing process evaluations and making adjustments are integral to implementing the program and ensuring that program resources always are being used effectively.

Process evaluation takes place during implementation and monitors the functioning of the program components. It includes an assessment of whether messages are being delivered appropriately, effectively, and efficiently; whether materials are being distributed to the right people and in the right quantities; whether the intended program activities are occurring; and other measures of how well the program is working.

The following are examples of ways to gather the information needed for a process evaluation:

- Use activity tracking forms.
- Use clipping and tracking services to gauge media (and social media) coverage.
- Gather feedback cards from members of your intended audience or make follow-up phone calls.
- Follow up with current partners and stakeholders to check their preparedness and interest.
- Gather regular status reports from staff, contractors, and partners.
- Meet in person or by telephone with program staff or partners to review your program's progress.
- Track traffic to project websites and other helpful stats, such as how long people stayed on the website and click-throughs on emails to see how many people forwarded a message.

Part VIII: Action Planning

Complete this action-planning template by inserting each objective identified in this tool. Fill in information for all headers to develop a detailed process and timeline for moving forward with your plan.

Questions to Consider

- What is a reasonable amount of time for us to devote to this?
- Is the timeline aligned to the (SMART) objectives?
- If we engage staff in this process, should we consider reducing other work assignments?
- Do we need to account for internal communication to be sure everyone understands the goals and objectives?

Example

Use the following sample to guide your planning. For additional examples, refer to the full Adult Education Sample Communication Plan.

Objective 1: By the end of the first quarter, demonstrate to the Department of Economic Development that partnerships with the Adult Education Agency are beneficial in connecting them with students who are prepared for employment opportunities.						
Audience <i>List audience relevant to this objective.</i>	Relevant Data Points <i>List relevant data points to support the message.</i>	Communication Channel(s) <i>List channel(s) or method(s) appropriate for each audience.</i>	Materials <i>List materials appropriate for the communication channel and audience.</i>	Resources Needed <i>List resources needed to develop and disseminate messages and materials.</i>	Due Dates/ Milestones <i>List due dates or key milestones. Consider internal and external factors. A full timeline also can be helpful to record the overall activities; see sample below.</i>	Responsible Person(s) <i>List team member(s) responsible for carrying out the activities that will accomplish this objective.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Economic Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of enrolled adult learners in a mathematics, technology, or engineering course at a community college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal channels: colleagues, partners, email • Group channels: professional meetings, in-person meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Infographic • Data • PowerPoint presentation • One-pager • Talking points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data sources • Talking points • Contact information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three months for implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – January 1 – February 15 – March 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [TBD]

Objective 1: By the end of the first quarter, demonstrate to the Department of Economic Development that partnerships with the Adult Education Agency are beneficial in connecting them with students who are prepared for employment opportunities.

Evaluation Measure(s): List or describe what will be measured and how. These should align with your objectives and be realistic based on your audience and the communication channel(s) you have chosen.

- Scheduled meeting with [person or job title] at the Department of Economic Development.
- Number and types of materials developed and disseminated to key stakeholders at the Department of Economic Development, including email, one-pager, infographic, and PowerPoint presentation.
- Agreement to collaborate with the Adult Education Agency.

Action Steps: Based on each factor presented above, list specific action steps and deadlines to meet the objective.	Date: Identify dates to accomplish each action step.	Person Responsible: Identify the person(s) responsible for completing the action step.
Develop email messages and talking points to reach key stakeholders at the Department of Economic Development.	January 1	TBD
Reach out to [person or job title] at the Department of Economic Development; schedule in-person meeting.	February 15	TBD
Define strategic opportunities with the Department of Economic Development; include in statewide combined adult education plan.	March 1	TBD

Other Notes:

Your Team's Plan

Objective 1:						
Audience	Relevant Data Points	Communication Channel(s)	Materials	Resources Needed	Due Dates/ Milestones	Responsible Person(s)
<i>List audience relevant to this objective.</i>	<i>List relevant data points to support the message.</i>	<i>List channel(s) or method(s) appropriate for each audience.</i>	<i>List materials appropriate for the communication channel and audience.</i>	<i>List resources needed to develop and disseminate messages and materials.</i>	<i>List due dates or key milestones. Consider internal and external factors. Provide full timeline in an appendix.</i>	<i>List team member(s) responsible for carrying out the activities that will accomplish this objective. List contact information in an appendix.</i>
•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Evaluation Measure(s): <i>List or describe what will be measured and how. These should align with your objectives and be realistic based on your audience and the communication channel(s) you have chosen.</i>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 						
Action Steps: <i>Based on each factor presented above, list specific action steps and deadlines to meet the objective.</i>				Date: <i>Identify dates to accomplish each action step.</i>		Person Responsible: <i>Identify the person(s) responsible for completing the action step.</i>
Other notes:						

Objective 2:

Audience <i>List audience relevant to this objective.</i>	Relevant Data Points <i>List relevant data points to support the message.</i>	Communication Channel(s) <i>List channel(s) or method(s) appropriate for each audience.</i>	Materials <i>List materials appropriate for the communication channel and audience.</i>	Resources Needed <i>List resources needed to develop and disseminate messages and materials.</i>	Due Dates/ Milestones <i>List due dates or key milestones. Consider internal and external factors. Provide full timeline in an appendix.</i>	Responsible Person(s) <i>List team member(s) responsible for carrying out the activities that will accomplish this objective. List contact information in an appendix.</i>
•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Evaluation Measure(s): <i>List or describe what will be measured and how. These should align with your objectives and be realistic based on your audience and the communication channel(s) you have chosen.</i>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 						
Action Steps: <i>Based on each factor presented above, list specific action steps and deadlines to meet the objective.</i>				Date: <i>Identify dates to accomplish each action step.</i>	Person Responsible: <i>Identify the person(s) responsible for completing the action step.</i>	
Other notes:						

Objective 3:

Audience <i>List audience relevant to this objective.</i>	Relevant Data Points <i>List relevant data points to support the message.</i>	Communication Channel(s) <i>List channel(s) or method(s) appropriate for each audience.</i>	Materials <i>List materials appropriate for the communication channel and audience.</i>	Resources Needed <i>List resources needed to develop and disseminate messages and materials.</i>	Due Dates/ Milestones <i>List due dates or key milestones. Consider internal and external factors. Provide full timeline in an appendix.</i>	Responsible Person(s) <i>List team member(s) responsible for carrying out the activities that will accomplish this objective. List contact information in an appendix.</i>
•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Evaluation Measure(s): <i>List or describe what will be measured and how. These should align with your objectives and be realistic based on your audience and the communication channel(s) you have chosen.</i>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 						
Action Steps: <i>Based on each factor presented above, list specific action steps and deadlines to meet the objective.</i>				Date: <i>Identify dates to accomplish each action step.</i>	Person Responsible: <i>Identify the person(s) responsible for completing the action step.</i>	
Other notes:						

Timeline

This is another sample of a timeline planner; use whatever works best for you.

	[Year]											
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Objective 1												
Activity 1												
Activity 2												
Objective 2												
Activity 3												
Activity 4												
Objective 3												
Activity 5												